	Loudoun County Government **Administrative Policies and Procedures**
Title: Use of Social Media	**Effective Date:** July 1, 2010
Number: INT-05	**Date Last Reviewed/Revised:** **Created** July 1, 2010 **Expiration Date:** June, 2014

Purpose:

To establish procedures and standards for county departments and agencies to use social media to engage with the public; to address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet, the ways residents communicate and obtain information online, and the ways the County communicates information; and to establish lines of responsibility for the use of social media.

Background:

Loudoun County encourages the use of social media tools to help build community and to engage effectively with stakeholders, partners, the general public and the media through online communications. These tools provide ways to deliver public information, customer service and e-government quickly and efficiently to our residents.

"Social media" are interactive tools that allow for communication in various ways through the Internet. They include web logs ("blogs"); social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace; video and photo sharing and archiving services such as YouTube, Flickr or webcasting; and Twitter, a means of sending short informational updates to subscribers. Definitions and more detailed descriptions of some of the more common social media are listed below.

In general, the county's policies with respect to the Internet (especially administrative policies INT-01 and INT-02) apply to the use of social media, which are found on the Internet.

Definitions:

A. **Social Media:** Interactive, online tools that may be used to engage residents, collect feedback from citizens, share information and generate awareness.

B. **Social Networking Websites:** Websites that focus on the building and verifying of online social networks for various purposes. Social networks connect people

with different types of interests. Members communicate by voice, chat, instant message, videoconference and blogs, and the service typically provides a way for members to contact friends of other members. Facebook, MySpace and Twitter are three popular examples.

C. **Social media creator**: A department head, member of County Administration, or constitutional officer who has the ultimate responsibility for creating and monitoring a social media site on behalf of the county government.

D. **Content Manager**: An authorized county representative who is responsible for posting social media communications with appropriate content as well as reviewing and responding to postings from the public to those communications.

E. **Internal social media author**: A county representative who submits material to a Content Manager for posting on a County-sponsored social media site.

F. **External social media author**: A member of the public, or other person not representing Loudoun County, who submits a social media communication or social media response for posting on a social media site.

G. **Social media moderator**: An authorized county representative, as designated by the County Administrator, who reviews content forwarded by content managers for review to determine if it is acceptable under the posting requirements of the county's social media policies.

H. **Social media communication**: An original posting of content to a county social media site that is created by or has been approved by the content manager.

I. **Social media response**: A comment, image or video posted or submitted for posting to a County-sponsored site by an external social media author.

J. **Principal social media site**: A site intended to encompass all facets of Loudoun County government and not linked to a specific department, official, team, group, issue or project.

K. **Departmental social media site**: A site linked to a specific department, official, team, group, issue or project, for which social media creator and content manager responsibilities are at the departmental level.

L. **Blog**: A user-generated website in which entries are typically made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, webpages, and other media related to its topic. Blogs typically allow users to leave comments in an interactive format.

M. **Photo-Sharing**: Publishing or transfer of a user's digital photos online, thus enabling the user to share them with others (whether publicly or privately). This functionality is provided through both websites and applications that facilitate the upload and display of images.

N. **Video-Sharing**: Distributing video clips through websites (such as YouTube) or software. Some services may charge, but most offer free services. Many services have options for private sharing and other publication options.

O. **Wiki**: A website that allows visitors to add, remove, edit and change content, typically without the need for registration. It also allows for linking among any number of pages.

Procedures:

Preliminary Issues

Potential development of a social media site should begin with thorough consideration of the following questions:

1. What are your department's goals? How can social media help achieve these goals?

2. Who are your customers?

3. What information do you wish to provide using social media?

4. Have your customers requested that this information be available through social media?

5. How much of the information will need to be updated on a recurring basis? How often will the information need to be updated? How much time will be required to update the information? Does your department have sufficient staff to update the information on a timely basis?

6. Will users have the expectation that they will be able to make public comments using the county's social media? Does your department have sufficient staff to monitor such comments and respond in a timely manner when appropriate?

7. Could other existing means of sending information electronically, such as e-mail, the Alert Loudoun system for emergency alerts, an electronic newsletter system (the Department of Information Technology supports the Lyris system) or the county website, be used just as effectively to reach the desired audience as the social media?

8. Would it be more efficient or effective to use the county's existing social media sites, such as the county's principal sites on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, working through the Public Information Office, than to set up separate sites?

9. Do you believe use of the social media will result in more efficient and/or cost-effective service?

10. Will the information to be disseminated using the social media require extensive writing, editing or production time? If so, does your department have sufficient staff to do this?

11. Do you currently have the staff and technological resources to generate, format and manage your social media sites?

12. Who will manage this media source if the employee who begins it resigns or transfers to a new job?

13. Have you ensured that your manager and department head support use of the social media?

How to Proceed

After you have thoroughly considered the previous questions, contact the county's Public Information Office. On behalf of the County Administrator, the Public Information Office oversees all county government processes for providing information through the Internet, and has the authority to review content to determine that consistent messages are being conveyed countywide. The Public Information Office coordinates these efforts with the Department of Information Technology and the Internet Steering Committee.

<u>Policies:</u>

A. All requests to establish social media websites must be approved by a social media creator – generally, the director of the department or agency that will be managing the site.

B. Social media creators are responsible for establishing, publishing, maintaining, reviewing and updating their pages on social media websites. It is the responsibility of all social media creators to ensure that their content is accurate, professional and up-to-date. Social media creators may request the assistance of the Public Information Office to initially create pages on social networking sites.

C. Department directors must ensure that employees do not create or participate in social media websites on an official basis without the necessary oversight or approval.

D. It is essential to ensure the continuity of social media operations in the event of personnel changes or lost passwords. Therefore, once any departmental pages on the social media sites are created, the social media creator must send a memo to the Department of Information Technology, with a copy to the Public Information Office, containing the following information: URLs of the new social media sites, login

information, including User IDs and passwords, the primary staff contact, and at least one backup staff person in the department or agency both initially and whenever passwords change. Passwords must be secure (see Administrative Policies and Procedures IT-03-11, Password Policy). The memo must be signed by the Department Director.

E. If an e-mail address is required to set up a social media site, social media creators must use their own county e-mail address when creating the site.

F. Departments shall ensure that, when individuals who have access to a social media site change jobs or separate from county employment, passwords are changed immediately in order to maintain security. Departments shall work with the company that owns the social media site to regain control over sites where an employee may have changed the password and did not inform the county.

G. Whenever possible, content should link back to the county website (www.loudoun.gov) for more information.

H. Departments must provide a link (including, but not limited to "friend" requests and video subscriptions) from departmental social media sites to the county's principal social media sites (such as those on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube) whenever possible.

I. Social media responses from internal or external social media authors are allowed on social media sites such as Facebook or YouTube, but the Comments sections of those sites must be monitored daily during working hours to ensure that the responses meet certain criteria. Avenues to allow social media responses to be posted publicly may be turned off, including discussion boards, "walls," and comments sections, if the social networking site allows this. Some social networking sites such as Facebook allow instant commenting while others like YouTube allow for a moderated/approved process. County-created social media forums must be structured narrowly to focus discussions on a particular item of interest of Loudoun County. Social media creators are only allowed to remove postings that do not address the particular topic(s) of interest. All sections of social media website postings that allow comments must include either a link to the following comments policy published on the county website or the complete text published on the social media site:

> The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in Loudoun County, including its residents, businesses and visitors. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments and concerns, but please note that this is a moderated online discussion site.
>
> Once posted, the county reserves the right to delete submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial or religious group. Further, the county also reserves the right to delete comments that: (i) are spam or include links to other

sites; (ii) are clearly off topic; (iii) advocate illegal activity; (iv) promote particular services, products, or political candidates or organizations; (v) infringe on copyrights or trademarks; or (vi) may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of Loudoun County government or its officers and employees. If you have any questions concerning the operation of this online moderated discussion, please contact the [Agency name] at [Agency e-mail]@loudoun.gov.

Social media creators and content managers are encouraged to reply to comments, just as they would reply to phone and e-mail inquiries. Business decorum must prevail, and only factual responses, not opinions, may be shared. Content managers and internal social media authors are strongly encouraged to coordinate with other departments or agencies, if appropriate, so the best response can be provided. If you reply on a social media platform, be aware that it is a series of conversations that constantly evolve. Provide constructive information that mirrors county information elsewhere, and don't try to control other people's opinions.

J.   For those social networking companies that do not allow the disabling of public comments, or where public comments are an essential component of a department's social media program, departments shall monitor these posts regularly. Those comments that may be considered obscene, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate according to criteria listed under Policy H above shall be immediately brought to the attention of that social networking company's administration for review.

K.   Official county blogs are allowed. The blogs must be kept fresh, and the information on the blogs must be up-to-date. The County Administrator reserves the right to shut down blogs that are stale or contain out-of-date information. Personal blogging may not be conducted from the county's technology environment: network, Internet connection or computers. Likewise, personal information technology (IT) resources (computers, network and/or wireless devices) are not allowed to be connected to the county's IT resources to facilitate personal uses such as blogging. Employees participating on non-county sponsored blogs (or other social media websites) during non-work hours may not make statements that purport to be on behalf of the county government. Responses to blogs from a county perspective should be coordinated with the Public Information Office.

L.   Content managers must ensure that comments they post in response to comments on social media websites or blogs appropriately represent the County government. For purposes of transparency and accountability, the names and positions of staff members who have access to a site as content managers must be posted in a static section of the site. If multiple staff members have access to a site as content managers, each content manager must state his or her first name when responding to public comments.

M. Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state and county laws, regulations and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Virginia Freedom of Information Act, First Amendment, privacy laws, Internet use, and information security policies established by Loudoun County.

N. To ensure compliance with records retention laws, social media sites must be copied and archived at least monthly. The archives should contain all postings on the social media sites, including social media responses. When possible, the Department of Information Technology will provide assistance in setting up processes for creating a copy of the formatted display of the content for archiving.

If more than two members of a public body (or two members of a committee or subcommittee consisting of three members) use Loudoun County social media to discuss public business using Loudoun County or external social media, they are responsible for retaining records of the discussion to ensure compliance with Virginia's records retention laws.

Members of Loudoun County public bodies that are subject to open meetings requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act – including the Board of Supervisors, its appointed advisory boards, committees and commissions, and subcommittees of those bodies – must not engage in communication with other members of the same body when posting comments on social media sites about matters that concern those public bodies.

O. Violation of these standards may result in the removal of departmental pages from social networking sites. The County Administrator retains the authority to remove County-sponsored pages or shut down County-sponsored social media sites.

P. If a department decides to shut down one of its departmental sites, the social media creator must first contact the Public Information Office and Department of Information Technology. The decision to close a site is subject to approval by the County Administrator. If the social networking company allows shutting down the site, then the social media creator is responsible for doing so. If it is not possible to shut down the site, then a message must be prominently placed on the site stating that the site is no longer active.

Responsibilities:

A. **Social Media Creators:** Social media creators are ultimately responsible for creating and maintaining their social media sites and supervising the individuals who serve as content managers and internal social media authors for those sites, to make sure that they perform their tasks and responsibilities in a timely and appropriate manner. Social media creators may request assistance from the Public Information Office to create social networking sites.

B. **Content managers:** Content managers shall create or approve social media communications, including managing delivery and publication of such communications in accordance with county policies, procedures, guidelines and standards, including maintaining necessary records. The content manager is responsible for regularly reviewing all social media responses. Responses that clearly do not meet the posting requirements shall be immediately removed by the content manager and sent to the social media moderator for a compliance determination. Content managers are responsible for keeping a record of all materials that are removed or not approved, the dates the material was submitted and approved, and the reason the materials were approved or not approved. The social media site must contain contact information for its content manager(s).

C. **Internal Social Media Authors:** Internal social media authors shall create social media communications in accordance with county policies and procedures and submit them to content managers for review before release through a social media site.

D. **Social Media Moderator:** The principal responsibility of the social media moderator is reviewing social media responses forwarded by content managers to determine if the responses meet the posting requirements, and notify the content manager of the appropriate action to take based on the moderator's determination. In addition, the social media moderator shall periodically review social media sites to determine if social media communications are appropriate, and may remove any communications that are not appropriate.

E. **Internet Steering Committee:** The Internet Steering Committee reviews policy issues with respect to social media and makes recommendations regarding priorities for development, use and expansion of these media. Members of the Internet Steering Committee are appointed by the County Administrator. It includes representatives of the Public Information Office, Department of Information Technology, and County Administration.

F. **Public Information Office:** The Public Information Office (PIO), working with the Department of Information Technology, will serve as content manager for the county's principal social media sites. In addition, PIO will offer assistance and guidance for moderated content and appropriate action to take when social media responses include information inquiries.

G. **Department of Information Technology:** The Department of Information Technology (DIT) shall approve and implement all social media technology-related software and tools used to create, manage and publish county social media-based content. DIT shall maintain a current inventory of all URLs for social media sites, the date the site was created, the content manager(s), and the date the site is removed, if applicable. This information may be made available as appropriate to allow integration and coordination of county communications.

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DIT shall also address exceptions associated with this policy identified in Administrative Policy/Procedure IT-03, Security and Access to Networks and Systems.

Responsible Departments

Policy Issues: Internet Steering Committee
Content Issues: Public Information Office
Technical Support: Department of Information Technology